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**Would the last one to leave, please turn out the lights?**

*A shocking energy report*

*by Congressmen Allen Boyd*

As one of the coldest winters in history continues, we have all felt the direct impact of skyrocketing energy prices on our wallet. In this time of national prosperity, we are now having to think twice before turning our heaters on for fear of the huge bill we'll receive at the end of the month. And only to make matters worse, we continue to have higher than normal prices at the gas pump. All of this is taking its toll on the elderly with fixed incomes, working families, farmers, and small business owners. It is time for a national energy policy that works.

OPEC's curtailing of their oil production, our nation's robust economic growth, and high demand because of the colder than usual winter have all contributed to the climbing energy costs across the country. As visions of rolling blackouts and emergency generators continue to haunt us, the California energy crisis serves as a warning to what could happen if our nation does not develop a long term, comprehensive energy policy. In order to prevent further economic hardships for millions of Americans, Congress and the President must act soon to ensure that our families and seniors do not have to make a choice between keeping warm or buying food and medicine. Finding a way to maintain an adequate and affordable supply of energy, while increasing efficiency and conservation must become a priority.

I have heard from many of you, concerned and suspicious of the recent hikes in the cost of natural gas. As your Congressman, I am working with my colleagues to determine the cause. To that end, I have co-sponsored H.R. 712, a bill that instructs the National Academy of Sciences to study and report to Congress the specific causes of the recent natural gas price increases. The goal of the report is to identify what federal action may be necessary to improve the national gas reserve supply for use during shortages and price increases and discuss what, if any, federal or state policies, that may have helped bring about the current situation.

More immediately, to help deal with the rising cost of our heating bills, at the end of last year, Congress included an increase in funding for LIHEAP, the Low Income Home Energy

Assistance Program. Congress also established and funded a 2 million barrel Northeast Oil Reserve to assist cold weather states if shortages develop and push prices higher. Additionally, I have cosponsored two bills that enable USDA to offer assistance to crop producers, livestock and poultry producers, and even greenhouse operators who have incurred severe economic losses as a result of increased energy costs.

Beyond the squeeze on our pocketbooks, increased dependency on foreign sources of fuel is a threat to our national security, and furthermore, underscores our immediate need for a national energy policy that works. Many have said that it is only during times of war that we appreciate the strength of our military. I might add that, unfortunately, only during times of high energy prices do we appreciate the importance of having a stable, domestic source of energy.

In 1959, our nation imported about sixteen percent of its oil and gas from foreign sources. In 2000, our imports were approximately 55 percent of all petroleum used in the nation. This level of dependency on foreign fuel is unwise. It is clearly in our national interest to increase our domestic production and explore alternative energy sources. We can no longer afford to be at the mercy of international cartels when it comes to our energy policy. While we should include aggressive diplomacy with OPEC and other oil exporting countries for increased production, we must have incentives to encourage the reopening of capped marginal oil and gas wells in the U.S. to increase our own production. Finally, we must work with private companies to develop alternative and renewable energy sources. To this end, I have cosponsored legislation to provide a 5\_year extension of the credit for electricity produced from wind. This is especially important for our long term energy goals.

In closing, we should look to California's situation and learn from their mistakes. As the debate continues on our overall energy strategy we must work together to ensure a sound future for America's energy supply.